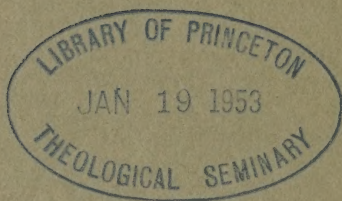


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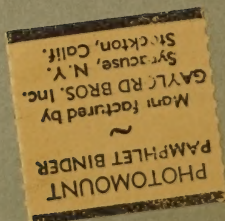
St. Gregory's
Responsions
to
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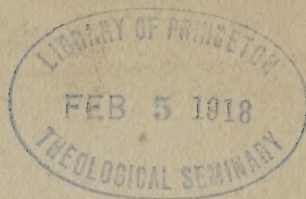


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St. Gregory's responsions to
St. Augustine



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ST. GREGORY'S
RESPONSIONS
TO - - - -
ST. AUGUSTINE.

F. A. Gasquet.

ST. GREGORY'S RESPONSIONS TO ST. AUGUSTINE.

[The following paper was prepared for the centenary celebrations in Rome on occasion of the thirteen hundredth anniversary of the election of Pope St. Gregory the Great. It was translated and read at the Academia, organised for that festivity by order of the late Holy Father Leo XIII., by Mgr., now His Eminence Cardinal, Tripepi. The paper, I believe, was printed in some Italian periodical, but I could never obtain a copy; and the original copy was lost by the late Dr. Salvatori, who had translated it for me. At the request of the Editor of the *Downside Review*, I have now endeavoured to put the paper together again from the rough notes, made fourteen years ago and which I had still by me. As it has never appeared in English, it is perhaps not inappropriate to publish it on occasion of the thirteenth centenary of the death of the great Pontiff in whose honour it was first written.]

CALLED upon by the Right Rev. Fr. President of the English Congregation of the Order of St. Benedict, which to this day glories in tracing its succession to the great Pontiff the centenary of whose election Rome now honours itself in celebrating, I am happy, as a grateful son of that same glorious Pope, though with diffidence, to find myself immediately associated in the festivities designed to do honour to his memory. There is moreover another reflection which encourages me, deeply as I feel my own incapacity worthily to appear among this assembly gathered together in the capital of christendom. After the shipwreck of religion in England in the sixteenth century, when the English Benedictine monks began once more to gather for common life in their own cloisters, the first monastery, now happily established at Downside, near Bath, which they erected was placed by them under the patronage of St. Gregory the Great, Apostle of the English nation. That I am a professed member of that monastery is no doubt the reason which determined

the Right Rev. Father President¹ in calling on me to address you.

Without further preface then I at once pass to the subject of this paper which, with the help of my collaborator Mr. Edmund Bishop, I have prepared. At first sight the subject, *The authenticity of the Responsions of St. Gregory to the Interrogatories or Questions of St. Augustine of England*, may appear unduly concrete, almost technical. But it has a side not without its living interest and illustrating in the most striking way the character of St. Gregory as the Apostle of the English people. Moreover, unless I am mistaken, it may by the way serve as an instance of what is rapidly becoming a distinct weakness in modern scientific research. We seem to be approaching a time when there shall be a French and English science, a German and an Italian technical method, lying apart one from another, because the multitude of erudite publications issuing from the presses of these countries is growing beyond the power of individuals to master. This evil is aggravated by an increasing minuteness and speciality of investigation, which threaten to break up the field of learning into separate and distinct sections, each pursuing its own isolated course.

According to St. Bede's history, St. Augustine found various difficulties in the course of his missionary work, as to which he consulted St. Gregory. St. Bede incorporated into his *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation* these questions proposed by the Apostle of the English and the replies of the Pontiff.

The difficulty first started was a practical one, as is often the case in these matters. In these *Responsiones* St. Gregory laid down the Canon, *ut jam tertia vel*

¹ The Right Rev. P. A. O'Neill, now Bishop of the Mauritius.

quarta generatio fidelium licenter sibi jungi debeat. So early as the first half of the eighth century the difficulty how to reconcile the permission or law thus stated by St. Gregory with the then prevalent marriage legislation of the Church became obvious.

This difficulty, however, was surmounted about the middle of the ninth century in a then characteristic way, by the forgery of documents under St. Gregory's name, which expressly restricted the application of the obnoxious law to the earliest days of the English Church. The same practical difficulties were again felt both in the eighteenth century and in the nineteenth, which got over them in a way equally characteristic of our own times : by the declaration that the document itself—the answers of St. Gregory—was spurious.

These difficulties took their origin as well in the eighth and ninth century as in the eighteenth and nineteenth, among a particular class—the Jurists—who have found it hard to reconcile St. Gregory's permission for marriage *in tertia vel quarta generatione* with the later prescriptions of Gregory II. and Gregory III., which are still the law of the Church. Quite recently an adept of another discipline—a liturgist—has from his point of view declared the document “certainly inauthentic.” At the same time it is to be observed that the most recent and careful Anglican writer on the history of the ancient English Church, Canon Bright, Regius Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Oxford, does not so much as betray the consciousness that a doubt has ever been cast upon the authenticity of the document at all. The fact that certain students of high repute have declared their conviction that these *Responsiones* are not the work of St. Gregory, may seem greatly to compromise the question, until the enquirer learns that there is also a body of jurists, no less eminent, who from

their point of view see no reason to reject the document as spurious; and further, that although it has been asserted often enough that the document is spurious, no one since C. S. Berardi, in 1752, has professedly instituted an examination into the question, although such a critical enquiry has been demanded in more than one quarter. It is proposed therefore here to state briefly and in a way devoid, it is to be hoped, of undue technicality, what is to be said on the question.

Of course for a conclusive settlement of the matter an examination of many manuscripts scattered in numerous libraries is necessary. But even without this it is quite possible here to indicate what the character of that conclusion is likely to be, and to make it hereafter easy to arrive at a definite judgment on the subject.

The date of the *Responsiones*, if the document be genuine, must, it is admitted, be September 16th, A.D. 601. Of the nine answers of which it is composed two relate to the question of church property; two to liturgical matters; two to marriage laws; two to questions respecting purity; and the remaining one to the relation between St. Augustine and the Gallic and British bishops respectively. The difficulty of the canonist centres round the answers as to marriage; that of the liturgist depends on the two replies to questions of ritual.

It is proposed to deal first with the question of liturgy, next with the objection of the canonists, and finally, taking the document as a whole, to enquire whether it bears on the face of it the marks of authenticity or of forgery.

I. THE QUESTION OF LITURGY.

The only writer by whom objection has been taken to the *Responsiones* on the score of the liturgical replies, so

far as we know, is the abbé Duchesne, in his admirable and perpetually suggestive work *Origines du Culte Chrétien*. This passage of his work, however, raises the doubt whether he has given that minute attention to the history of the English Church in the seventh century with a personal interest almost imposes on us. In his picture of the Mission of St. Augustine and his successors he would appear to have been somewhat unduly influenced by recent writers of the Anglican Church, who have in some measure allowed the stress of present controversy to trouble their historical imagination. But when it is stated specifically that “Il n'est pas douteux que l'archevêque Théodore n'ait fait des concessions, dans le domaine liturgique aux usages introduits par les apôtres irlandais. Aussi les plus vieux livres Anglo-Saxons sont ils loin de contenir la liturgie romaine sous une forme absolument pure. Ils abondent en détails Gallicans,”—we feel that he has not merely a little anticipated the results of detailed researches which have yet to be made, but has misunderstood the state of the liturgical situation under St. Theodore. Roughly speaking, it may be said that difficulties *as to liturgy* did not exist for that great prelate. The questions of Easter and of the tonsure can hardly be called liturgical; but even they had been already disposed of before his arrival in England; whilst the differences between St. Wilfrid and the Iro-Scottic clergy—a point too often overlooked—were really rooted in the different ideals so plainly discernible in the English and Irish characters. So far then as liturgy proper is concerned, difficulties do not appear on the surface of any of the documents relating to Theodore's archiepiscopate that still remain. As soon as we look beneath the surface there is good reason for believing that they were not felt.

St. Wilfrid's admiration for Rome, like St. Benet

Biscop's, was rooted in that love of splendour, whether in ceremonial or building, which so markedly characterised the then rising generation of Englishmen. But as regards technical differences of liturgy he could have found no difficulty, as he knew and had followed without scruple the Gallican rite during his three years residence with Archbishop Delphinus of Lyons. As regards the disciples of the Iro-Scots who did not follow St. Colman back to Ireland, so little did they insist on the ritual peculiarities of their former teachers, that very few years elapsed before they introduced into Lindisfarne the Rule of St. Benedict, which, as is well known, is largely made up of purely liturgical prescriptions. Looking therefore into the facts, so far as they are recorded, there is nothing in the least degree indicating that there existed a liturgical difficulty which St. Theodore found himself "*chargé de liquider.*"

The other point of liturgical objection to the genuine character of the *Responsiones* is that the answer of St. Gregory "*témoigne à l'endroit des rites, d'une indifférence incompatible avec l'esprit romain. Ce n'est pas un Romain ni surtout un Pape, qui eût pu écrire la phrase : non enim pro locis res, sed pro rebus loca nobis amanda sunt.*"

It is true the document in question says : *Sed mihi placet, sive in Romanâ, sive in Galliarum, seu in quâlibet ecclesiâ, aliquid invenisti quod plus Omnipotenti Deo possit placere, sollicite eligas, et in Anglorum ecclesiâ, quæ adhuc in fidem nova est, institutione præcipuâ quæ de multis ecclesiis colligere potuisti, infundas. Non enim pro locis res, sed pro rebus loca nobis amanda sunt.* But we have to deal not with something so wide as "*l'esprit romain,*" nor even with a Pope in general, but with St. Gregory the Great. It certainly would appear from his own letters that this large minded policy

was not markedly foreign to his spirit. Thus to St. Leander of Spain he writes in regard of Baptism : *in unâ fide nihil officit Sanctæ Ecclesiæ consuetudo diversa* (Ep. Lib. I, 43), and he defends his attitude towards the ceremonies of the church of Constantinople thus : *Tamen si quid boni vel ipsa vel altera Ecclesia habet, ego et minores meos quos ab illicitis prohibeo in bono imitari paratus sum. Stultus est enim qui in eo se primum existimat, ut bona quæ viderit discere contemnat.* (Ep. Lib. IX., 12). On both these points therefore on examination the difficulties raised simply disappear.

This will be sufficient to show that from the point of view of liturgy the sweeping statement that the *Responsiones* are "certainly inauthentic" is not borne out by the facts.¹

II. THE OBJECTION OF THE CANONIST.

The question has now to be examined in view of the objections raised by canonists, although we approach the matter with some trepidation, since one of their most recent writers has distinctly warned the historian that juristic training is necessary in dealing with this matter. It has been pointed out how St. Gregory's marriage-laws have gravely troubled the minds of jurists. Whether for the prelate, who had to deal with the question in practical life, or for the forger, who attempted a sanation of documents by inventing new letters under St. Gregory's name, the readiest solution was to treat the *Responsiones* as merely a temporary provision designed to meet the circumstances of a people newly converted to the faith. As they never questioned the authentic character of the document, this was the

¹ Since this paper was written Mgr. Duchesne has withdrawn his verdict as to the spurious nature of the document, in deference to the opinion of the late Professor Mommsen. (Note 1904).

most obvious way of reconciling the permission and advice of the *Responsiones* with the practice of their days. This mode of conciliation, however, has naturally fallen into the background since some canonists, following Berardi, have found it easier to get rid of the document altogether by declaring it spurious. So far as we have been able to pursue the enquiry, the method adopted by recent writers who reject it has been rather that of authority than investigation; for with hardly an exception they rest merely on Berardi in his *Gratiani Canones*. Several authors also are convinced of the spurious character of the document by the uncertain state of the text; the historian Rettburg in 1848 adding, however, one or two further considerations.

All these special difficulties, however, even those elaborated at such length by Berardi, seem to disappear upon the consideration of one fact. It is true that the history of the relaxation of the forbidden degrees of marriage is somewhat obscure, still this much is clear; that a considerable development took place in the seventh century, and it progressed very rapidly in the first thirty years of the eighth. Confining our attention to England we find as witnesses of the practice in this matter, St. Theodore about A.D. 680, and St. Boniface about half-a-century later. Now St. Theodore's prescription on the subject occupies a place midway between the directions given in the *Responsiones* and the practice of St. Boniface; being more rigid than the former and not so rigid as the latter. Looked at therefore from the mere point of view of the historian, in regard to the development of marriage laws in England, the *Responsiones*, in order to occupy their natural place in history, must be attributed to a period antecedent to St. Theodore; in other words to St. Gregory, from whom they profess to proceed.

One difficulty, however, has to be considered. It is a commonplace of the subject that St. Boniface only knew of this document, but did not possess a copy. He sent to Rome, but it was not to be found in the *Scrinium* of the Roman church; so he accordingly applied to Canterbury, and in so doing he expressed doubts as to its possible genuineness. His difficulty was grounded on the decree of the Council of Rome in A.D. 731, which positively prohibited marriage within the seventh degree. This he was at a loss to reconcile with the permission granted in the *Responsiones*, and he accordingly requested the Archbishop of Canterbury *ut scrupulosâ cautelâ studeatis diligenter investigare si illa comprobetur* to be St. Gregory's work or not.

But this surely, so far from being an objection to the authenticity of the document, is rather an argument in its favour. St. Boniface, as is well known, was thoroughly versed in the practice of the English church of his own day, and entertained a profound respect for its customs. If the *Responsiones* had been, as is suggested, the work of St. Theodore or of his entourage, that is to say dating merely from a time only some thirty or forty years before St. Boniface's departure from England on his mission, is it probable that he would have known nothing of it, or of the practice which it is supposed to represent? On the other hand, granting that the *Responsiones* were actually the work of St. Gregory, and that the permission as to degrees of affinity only represented the practice as applied to the first English converts, a practice which, in Theodore's days had already fallen into disuse, it is perfectly easy to understand how such a document, interesting to the historian, might never have come to St. Boniface's knowledge at all.

One more question of detail requires to be dealt with

before passing on to some general considerations and a conclusion. A recent and most learned writer on the history of Canon Law, who has not found in the arguments of Berardi, even when reinforced by later writers, reasons sufficiently strong to convince him that these *Responsiones* are spurious, has justly remarked that no final conclusion can be arrived at until the evidence of the early MSS. has been examined. Up to this date practically nothing has been done in this direction, and of course here such examination in detail would be out of place, even if it could be done. Still it is possible even here to clear up a misunderstanding. St. Bede, who incorporated the *Responsiones* with many letters of St. Gregory in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation*, states that some *letters* (*epistolæ*) were obtained for him in Rome at a date previous to A.D. 731, by the priest Nothelm, who was afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury. In A.D. 736, however, St. Boniface says he could get no copy of the *Responsiones* from Rome; and the conclusion has since been drawn that the document must have been discovered at Rome subsequently to 736, and thence communicated to Bede. But this assumption seems somewhat hasty. There is nothing in that historian's own words which necessitates such a conclusion, and in other passages of his history he twice calls the document a *libellus* and expressly distinguishes it from the letters. This may help to explain why, not being treated as a letter, it could not be found in the *Scrinium* of the Roman church when St. Boniface made enquiry on the subject.

But to turn from these particulars to the broader considerations whereby eventually the document must stand or fall, and which in the tendency so common at the present day to restrict discussions merely to particular points of detail, are apt to be forgotten. Does the

document, as a whole bear on the face of it evidence of forgery? The *Responsiones* is an elaborate tract, or as St. Bede calls it, *libellus*, relating to many subjects. Supposing it to be a forgery, the object of its author must either have been to apply the *whole* to a particular set of circumstances; or, under cover of the papal name, to give validity to *one or two special points*, concealed among a multitude of harmless prescriptions.

Taking the latter case it is seen that in the only two points that have been suggested as the motive for the forgery, namely liturgical difficulties and the marriage question, the reasons adduced do not bear the test of an examination into fact. Taking the former case, it may be safely asserted that, looking closely into the history of England in the seventh century, the circumstances to which this document as a whole is suitable existed in the time of St. Augustine and St. Gregory, and at that time alone. Further it suits the circumstances of that time, not merely as a whole, but also in all its parts.

Lastly, there is in the correspondence of St. Gregory a letter affording corroborative evidence of the genuineness of this document which must not be overlooked. The writer of the *Responsiones* refers his interrogator to Vergillius, Archbishop of Arles, in case he should journey to Gaul. A letter exists in St. Gregory's Register which is in fact the counterpart of this, since it is an Epistle to Vergillius of Arles recommending St. Augustine to him should he come to Arles. This document is dated 22nd June, A.D. 601, which is the only year to which the despatch of the *Responsiones* from Rome can be assigned.

Tried then point by point by usual methods, these *Responsiones* vindicate their authenticity as a genuine production of St. Gregory whose name they bear.

On the occasion of the Centenary of the Pontiff who

stands at the meeting point of the ancient and the modern world, and who in his unique greatness is not unworthy to close the ancient page and to open the new, we may be allowed from distant England to see with St. Bede in this "little book" of his *Responsiones* evidence of the spirit of him whom we glory in revering as the Apostle of our race. For to use the words of that venerable historian "he indeed, by his loving care rescuing our people from worshipping of idols and from the power of Satan, turned them to the faith," and made them part of the Church of Christ. So that we at least may apply to Pope St. Gregory the Great the Apostle's word, for if to others he be not an Apostle he is so to us; *nam nos signaculum apostolatus ejus sumus in Domino*.

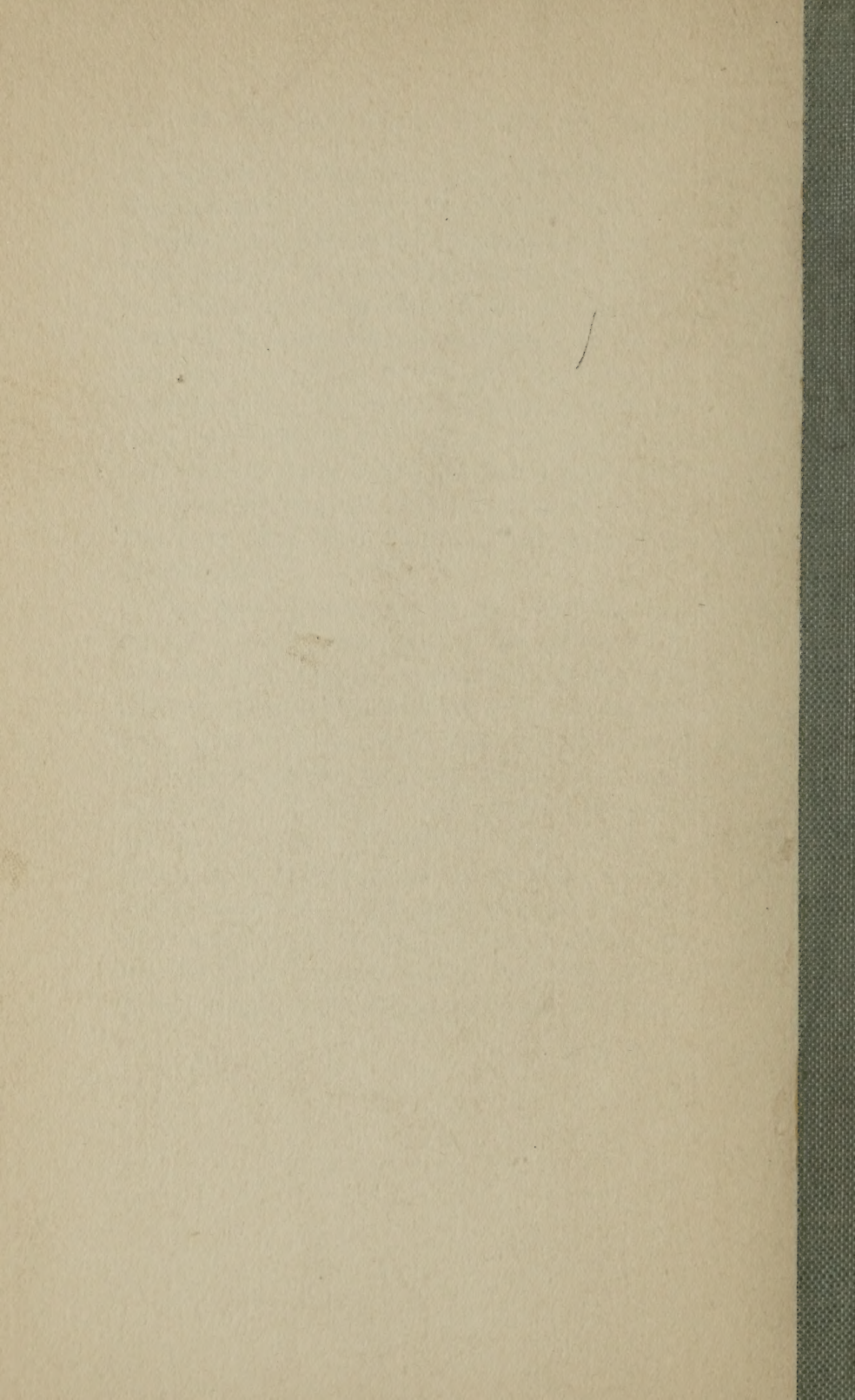
Bear with me if I say that in these answers of St. Gregory to St. Augustine, we in England seem to find expressed those traits of broad and sound practical sense which, as history shows—at least so it appears to us—have been impressed by his disciples on the very character of the English people. It is sometimes made a matter of reproach to us that frequently, although attaining the end proposed, we follow methods not strictly logical or theoretically accurate. With us, rules have continually to give way before the immediate circumstances; yet it is found that through all the end as first conceived is steadily pursued. What characterises the *Responsiones* of St. Gregory, is the wise discretion which knows how to relax as well as how to maintain the strictness of rule; how by condescension to adapt even untoward circumstances into means for securing the very end desired; and how to admit of the good from whatever quarter derived, even though it were not what he had himself learned in that which he loved best of all earthly cities, his own glorious Rome.

History has justified him in that breadth of mind,

that generous confidence, that apostolic zeal and undaunted courage, which all combined have won for him, pre-eminently among the successors of Peter, the title of "the Great." Is it too fanciful to imagine that, when he looked into the fair faces of those Anglo-Saxon boys in the market-place at Rome, he in his wisdom saw the capacities which still lay dormant in that barbarous race, and desired that they, under his fostering care, and with something of his large-hearted spirit infused into them, might be made a powerful instrument in re-establishing the supremacy of the Catholic faith, which at that time in the West seemed so gravely compromised ?

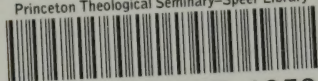
The third generation of the English converts had hardly passed away before the roads of Gaul were crowded with English pilgrims bound for the Holy City, and returning thence, with the arts, sciences and learning, and, what is more, with that special love of the See of Peter which is noted by writer after writer on the continent of Europe. Yet another generation or two and on the continent itself the face of the church was renewed, under the influence of those zealous English missionaries who were taught in the school of St. Gregory. Of these the chief was St. Boniface, and their watch-word, was fidelity to him who held the See of the Great Gregory, the successor of St. Peter, the Vicar of Christ.

F. A. GASQUET.



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